

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

JANUARY 2012

FOUR DOLLARS



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JANUA





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BOB DUNCAN
Executive Director



75 Years
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The arrival of 2012 presents an opportunity to share with you an important milestone: 75 years of conservation work dedicated to wildlife across this great country, first made possible by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act. That legislation, passed in 1937, fostered partnerships between federal and state fish and wildlife agencies, the sporting arms industry, hunters, shooters, anglers, and conservation groups, and has been key to implementing the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.

Instrumental to the terms and passage of the bill was former chairman of our board, A. Willis Robertson, who served our agency between 1926 and 1933. A protégé of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, Robertson had both a keen intellect and unique insight about the condition of game populations in Virginia. The intent of this national legislation was both bold and visionary, and its passage during a period of austerity with little to celebrate in the public arena, that much more remarkable. That this bill to establish a reliable fund for states to conduct wildlife research and habitat restoration has withstood the test of time can be attributed to the following insertion, scribbled quickly on a scrap of notepaper, as the story is told, by Robertson's hand: "... and which shall include a prohibition against the diversion of license fees paid by hunters for any other purpose than the administration of said state fish and game department."

Ah, the magic of those 29 words which have had an enduring, profoundly positive impact on wildlife in this country!

Thirteen years later, the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (now the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act) was passed. Together, what has become the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program has contributed more than \$12 billion to fish and wildlife conservation in the U.S.—through a self-imposed excise tax paid by manufacturers and users of outdoors gear, a motorboat fuel tax, and the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses. Here in Virginia, federal aid has enabled countless game and fisheries projects to come to fruition, from the early stocking of deer and wild turkeys in counties where their numbers were faltering, to the purchase and management of more than 200,000 acres of dedicated wildlife management areas, to the recent restoration of the Coursey Springs Fish Hatchery in Bath County—our largest trout-rearing station, key to stocking efforts across the state.

In celebrating the success of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program, we also acknowledge the meaningful public and private partnerships that, together, conserve and manage fish and wildlife. The benefits of these partnerships are enjoyed by sportsmen and sportswomen and by all who appreciate wildlife, myself included.

Those who know me say that I have been "a long time coming" to celebrating successes throughout my professional career. And looking back, I will admit to the truth of that statement. Perhaps that is why, with the wisdom of age, I am delighted and honored to take note of this significant milestone for a program that has benefitted so many species and served all of us so well.

With your support, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program will continue to conserve habitat for game and fish and create wildlife-related recreational opportunities well into the future. On behalf of our agency and the mission that guides us, I thank you.

MISSION STATEMENT

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

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A close-up photograph of animal fur, likely a trap, with a metal trap visible on the right side. The fur is dark brown and textured. The text is overlaid in the center.

The New Faces of Trapping

While trapping may be on the decline throughout much of the country, some newcomers are broadening both the tradition and the stereotype.

by Ken Perrotte

Blanche Conley spread her arms as if walking a tightrope as she teetered along the narrow, exposed top of a beaver dam in the chilling drizzle of a February morning. She wore a warm blaze orange jacket and cap and was snuggled into neoprene chest waders, but a slip and tumble into the pool to the upstream side of the dam would surely transition the morning from unpleasant to miserable. Minutes earlier, she and friend Michael Meisberger had been thigh deep in the beaver swamp, resetting one of the many traps they had placed to try to catch the broad-tailed, buck-toothed busybodies.

An hour west, amid the rolling hills of Orange County, 13-year-old Cierra Colvin watches in amazement as her mother, Lisa, deftly skins a large beaver trapped by her father. Lisa Colvin's personal record is just

around six minutes to completely and carefully skin a beaver. The Colvins live in Barboursville. While they trap in the winter to obtain fur for the market, Cierra and her mom spend many summer hours setting and checking traps as part of a nuisance animal control service business the family runs.

"In the summer, we'll use two trucks. Steve will go one way to check traps and Cierra and I head the other way," she explained.

Conley, Cierra, and Lisa are rarities—women that trap.

Some trapping, such as for beaver and muskrat, can yield results beyond the sale of any fur. For example, managing beaver populations is critical to preserving mixed habitat. Beavers can cause unwanted flooding of timber stands, agricultural crops, and pastures, as well as damage to road systems. Muskrats can cause erosion problems in areas where a landowner may want to preserve a dam or levee.

Predator species such as fox, raccoon, opossum, and skunk prey on cavity-nesting birds and their eggs as well as ground-nesters like quail and turkey. Studies have shown increased populations of popular game birds in areas where managed trapping takes place. Trapping also helps check the spread of rabies.

An Air Force veteran, Ruther Glen resident Conley met Navy veteran Meisberger on the train during their commute to work at Fort Belvoir. A relationship blossomed and Meisberger soon introduced Conley to deer hunting.

"The first time I saw Michael gut a deer, I was fascinated. I was very curious about the animal's biology," Conley said.

Conley began developing an interest in



©Ken Perrotte



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Blanche Conley removes a beaver hide from a stretching hoop.

the outdoors during visits to her grandparents' Kentucky farm, but never envisioned a day when she'd be in a "fur shed" until midnight, scraping a muskrat hide. "I had only heard of muskrat in a song," she said with a laugh.

Two years ago, a friend of Michael's son was getting involved in trapping and the more they heard, the more they became interested. "We heard about the beginners trapping course sponsored by the Virginia Trappers Association (VTA). I said, 'Let's go see what this is all about,'" Conley explained.

Lisa Colvin began trapping in 1994, "mainly because I married him," she said with



Michael Meisberger and Blanche Conley walk gingerly along a beaver dam after setting a trap.

a nod to her husband, Steve, who was coordinating activities at the annual March fur-buying auction in Fishersville. Steve is a 4th-generation trapper and current president of the Virginia Trappers Association. Cierra, the Colvins' only child, embraced her parents' outdoor ways, not only trapping but hunting, enthusiastically.

"I've shot a lot of deer, using a muzzle-loader, a crossbow, and I have a .243 and .30-06," she proudly announced.

She admitted a .30-06 might be a little much, recoil-wise, for a slender young lady but added, "At the moment of the shot, you're so focused on making a good, clean shot and

dropping that animal right there that you don't notice."

An athlete, Cierra plays basketball and softball and has run track. "I'm an athlete, outdoors-type girl, but I like doing girl stuff, too, things like shopping and makeup," she admitted with a wry smile.

Involved Process

The women have no qualms about participating in the full process, whether it's setting traps, dispatching and skinning the animals, or then fleshing and stretching the hides.

"I'm inexperienced," Conley said. "It can take two to three hours just to do one animal.

I hope to get the whole process down to about an hour."

Getting more adept in the fur shed would help, especially on days when several traps are successful. Conley and Meisberger set 30 traps of varying types in several locations, many of them in and around the water. It's not unusual to have a few days go by without a single animal being caught, but some successful days yield a bounty of otter, beaver, fox, and raccoon fur. Such productivity can leave them toiling in the skinning shed until well past midnight.

Cierra said she didn't start skinning animals until she was age ten but now confidently



©Ken Perrotte



©Bill Lea

Skunk Wrangling

Few things can inspire sensory imagination like visualizing a beady-eyed, white-striped polecat lifting its tail in preparation of dousing you with a pungent liquid that'll leave you a social pariah even in your own home. Yet, skunks are something Lisa Colvin and her daughter, Cierra, encounter frequently as they participate in the family's nuisance trapping business.

"Summer is a big time for trapping groundhogs," Colvin explained, "but then there are skunks, always an adventure.

"Some of them you can talk softly to and just gently pick up the cage; others you have to cover [with a tarp or similar impervious wrap]. With others you just don't know what you're going to get.

"There was one skunk that started tapping his feet. Cierra took off running as the tail lifted. I wasn't so lucky and ended up taking the shot," Colvin said, with a mix of smile and grimace.

Nuisance trapping can be a good way to earn some extra money, but there's no doubt that was one hard payday.

Cierra Colvin, left, and Lauren Bedwell inspect pelts at the annual Virginia Trappers Association fur auction.

boasts she can skin a beaver in 10 to 15 minutes, depending on its size. Her dad still helps with the fleshing chores, a process where residual meat or fat is scraped away until the skin is clean.

Once trapping season ends, the Colvins, Conley, and Meisberger bundle up the season's reward of dried pelts and haul them to the VTA's fur auction. Fur trappers bringing pelts to a central sales point for grading and selling has a long tradition. Mountain man fur trappers of the wild Rocky Mountains used to haul their pelts to a summer "rendezvous." Compared to the one-day auctions of today, the gatherings of old were frequently weeks-long events that featured all types of social activities for the often solitary trappers.

Prime fur fetched prices ranging from \$16 for raccoon, \$48.50 for otter, and \$26.50 for beaver, to \$2.75 for skunk at recent area auctions.

Bounced against the hours and logistics associated with running a trapline for folks like Conley and Meisberger, it's easy to see why they say, "We're not in it for the money." Instead, Conley said her new trapping and hunting experiences help her reconnect to the outdoors. The skills she is learning feeds her sense of self-reliance. She values how willingly experienced trappers shared their knowledge.

Art Foltz, VTA District 8 director, said Conley is a serious student of the game. "It's

rare to find new trappers altogether, much less female trappers. I haven't had the opportunity to trap with Blanche and Michael. However, they attend all of our district meetings and are at front and center during our demonstrations. You can see and hear their enthusiasm during discussions. Often, during the season, they email me questions regarding their trapline and techniques," he said.

"Trapping isn't rocket science," Foltz admitted, "but has a steep learning curve for the uninitiated. A mentor can put them on track to catching animals quicker than book read-



©Ken Perrotte

Trappers and prospective buyers evaluate furs brought to the annual March auction in Fishersville.

ing and trial and error. The old days of not sharing trade secrets are long past.

"Most of our district members enjoy helping new trappers get started," he added.

What Do Friends Think?

Conley said she doesn't talk much about her trapping activities with her fellow federal employees, but it's the male associates who show the most interest when she does share her new-found interests.

"My friends don't say much about it, especially the girls," Cierra said. "Some say 'Ewww,' but the guys think it's pretty cool that I like to do outdoors stuff like hunt and fish." Her young friend, Lauren Bedwell, ten, of Max Meadows in Wythe County, has been visiting traplines with her father, John Bedwell, since she was four. Lauren's father still helps her set traps and skin the animals, but she brought nearly 20 raccoons and three muskrats to the Fishersville fur auction.

"I like going out and trapping and seeing the animals in their habitat," Lauren said, who has been a cheerleader but not engaged in any team sports yet. "I don't talk about it much with my friends, but they'd probably think it's nasty. They're girly-girls. I tell them it's fun and I do it because I like it," she added.

"I enjoy seeing her excitement when we've made a catch, especially when it's in one of her traps," Bedwell said. "I really enjoy having her with me in the outdoors. It's quality time."

Lisa Colvin noted, "I know in a few years she'll be gone to college, and our getting out working the traplines is a good opportunity to spend mother-daughter time together."

She is confident Cierra will stay involved in trapping as she gets older. With obvious pride, she declared, "She's a natural, just like her dad." ❀

Ken Perrotte is a King George County resident and the outdoors columnist for Fredericksburg's Free Lance-Star newspaper.

RESOURCES

To learn more about trapping, see:

www.virginiatrappers.org

Visit the Department's website, at:

www.dgif.virginia.gov/hunting/regulations



©Ken Perrotte



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Blanche Conley invests many hours in the skinning shed at her Caroline County home. Animal hides are scraped clean of any flesh, stretched on various hoops, and then dried.

A large flock of white geese is captured in flight, filling the sky and water. The geese are in various stages of flight, with wings spread, creating a sense of chaotic movement. The background is a deep blue, suggesting a body of water or a clear sky. The overall scene is dynamic and visually striking.

A Not So Wild Goose Chase

Id
se

Research turns up Virginia's link with an Arctic island.

by Curtis Badger

Greater snow goose number 44CC had apparently made herself at home. That was the conclusion my wife Lynn and I reached after spending several days looking for banded snow geese at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge last fall. After we made four trips and logged in 22 different birds, this goose was the only one present and accounted for on each occasion. She clearly had taken a liking to the shallow impoundment behind the beach, hanging out with others that, like her, had recently completed a trip from the Arctic and now were looking for a little R&R.

Waterfowl hunters have for years been harvesting banded ducks and geese and reporting the band numbers to government agencies. This helps biologists establish migratory patterns, and consequently, provide resting and foraging opportunities for waterfowl as they move between breeding grounds in the north and winter homes along the coast. Many national wildlife refuges, including Chincoteague, were created primarily to provide migratory habitat for waterfowl.

While banding reports no doubt helped biologists establish flyway patterns, there was one serious drawback. In pretty much every case, the band number came from a dead bird. The chances for a re-sighting, as with snow goose 44CC, were very slim. But modern technology now makes it possible to record band numbers, report them, and have the bird move on to be spotted again; thus giving biologists the opportunity to track the movements of individual birds.

It also gives amateurs like Lynn and me the opportunity to participate in a little citizen science. The snow geese are banded on their breeding grounds in the Arctic, and some of the females are fitted with a yellow neck collar in addition to the traditional metal leg band. The collar typically has a four-digit alpha-numeric code. Greater snow geese
(cont. pg. 13)



Female PC52 was found on Bylot Island, Nunavut Province, with newly hatched goslings.



A flock of geese (moulting adults and goslings) are rounded up and led into a holding pen for banding.

©Curtis Badger

Image courtesy of ©Jean-François Lamarre

Image courtesy of ©Marie-Christine Cadieux

Chasing Geese

Want to participate in a little citizen science? Reporting neck collar codes on snow geese helps biologists understand migration, and it can help you learn a lot about these geese that winter along the coast in flocks of a thousand or more.

You'll need a good binocular, or, preferably, a spotting scope with a solid support such as a tripod or car window mount. The collars are usually bright yellow, about four inches wide, with a four-digit code in black lettering. Even with a powerful scope, it still is necessary to get fairly close to the birds. We found that the best place to do this is at wildlife refuges that have access drives near impoundments used by the birds. At Chincoteague NWR, for example, Wildlife Loop circles around a huge impoundment used by geese for most of the winter. Geese seem to become accustomed to seeing vehicles and you can get fairly close.

Weather matters. Bright, sunny days make those yellow collars stand out. Windy days make the code difficult to read because the scope shakes and because moving vegetation can obscure the lettering.

It's easiest to get close to the birds soon after they arrive. Once they've been hunted, they will become very skittish. Last year, impoundments on Chincoteague NWR froze in early December and a memorable Christmas blizzard followed that, forcing the birds to scatter. Attempts to approach them in farm fields were not successful, and many birds moved farther south to find food.

Report collar numbers at www.reportband.gov. Once you've reported one and provided the required information, you can easily report others. If you have a re-sighting from the same area, it's best not to report it unless 30 days or more have passed since the previous sighting.

You should get an email notice that your report was received within a few minutes. A full report and "certificate of appreciation" should arrive by email in a few days, as long as information on the bird has been entered into the database.



Image courtesy of ©Marie-Christine Cadieux

Adult geese are put in a separate pen from goslings. Those with yellow collars are female adults.



Image courtesy of ©Marie-Christine Cadieux

The banding team is hard at work banding goslings first, then adults.



Image courtesy of @Marie-Christine Cadieux



Goslings are held in a separate pen to ensure they are not trampled by adults.



Image courtesy of @Marie-Christine Cadieux

Biologist and banding manager Marie-Christine Cadieux has just put a yellow plastic collar on this female snow goose.

tend to fly in large flocks and keep their distance from people, but we found that with a good quality spotting scope and a great deal of patience, we could accurately read the code numbers and report them.

Reporting collar numbers, not surprisingly, involves the Internet. After each trip we went to www.reportband.gov, which took us to the website of the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Bird Banding Laboratory. Reporting each number takes only a minute or so, and the report was quickly confirmed by an email. The fun part comes a few days later when an email arrives giving the date and place the bird was banded, the name of the bander, and the age and sex of the bird. All of this comes in the form of a certificate of appreciation from the U.S. Geological Survey (Patuxent's parent organization) and the Canadian Wildlife Service, who are cooperating in the program.

Hunting Snow Geese

Snow geese are plentiful along the Virginia coast in winter, often flying in flocks of more than a thousand. But hunting them can be problematic. It usually takes a lot of decoys to attract a huge flock of geese, and mature birds that have been shot at before are very wary. Grayson Chesser, owner of Holden Creek Gun Club (757-824-9666) on the Eastern Shore, has been hunting snow geese for years, using everything from large rigs of decoys set around a pit blind, to using no decoys at all.

"The most decoys I've used was about 2,700, but this was a long-term rig," says Chesser. "It worked well, but birds that had been in the area for a while learned to avoid it, so we depended on new arrivals. The most important aspect of goose hunting today is scouting. You need to find out where the birds are feeding, and then locate an area nearby that still has plenty of food available. Often, in a situation like this, you don't even need decoys. You need to be well concealed, and it takes patience. Sometimes the flock will land out of range, but they'll work their way to you. It's exciting to be there in a blind and have the geese come in around you, and you can hear them and watch their behavior."

Chesser advises hunters not to try to creep up on a flock. "If they see you do that, they assume you're a predator. It's better to just walk slowly toward them. We had our best day last year doing that. I sent the dog out in front of us, and the geese seemed mesmerized by the dog. We were able to approach until the geese were in range."



Eugene Hester

The arrival of snow geese on the Eastern Shore is an annual event celebrated by hunters, birders, and visiting tourists.

We reported collar numbers from four trips dating from November 5 through December 2, all at Chincoteague NWR. We reported 30 numbers, eight of which were re-sightings. As we received responses from the website, we set up a spreadsheet of our own and made an interesting discovery. Nearly all of the birds we reported had been banded at the same place—on the south plain of Bylot Island, just north of Baffin Island in the Nunavut Province in Arctic Canada, by a team led by Dr. Gilles Gauthier of Laval University. A few of the birds had been banded that summer, but some of them had been banded in 2002 and 2003, making them nearly ten years old. All of them make the annual trip from the Virginia coast to Bylot Island and back again—a distance of some 4,800 miles!

We contacted the banders and began to learn more about Bylot Island and about snow geese in general. Foremost, they are creatures of habit. The pairs mate for life, and the females tend to return to the same breeding territory year after year. They also use the same migratory routes year after year, weather permitting. What puzzled us was this connection between Bylot Island and the Virginia coast. Bylot is icebound for most of the year. We thought of it as a 6,900-square-mile ice cube, punctuated by mountain peaks separated by perpetual glaciers. And then we learned more.

"Most of Bylot Island is mountainous, but south of the mountain range is a plain with extensive lakes, ponds, and grassy wetlands, along with elevated terraces and hills," explained Marie-Christine Cadieux, project coordinator for the Bylot Island studies.



geese could have on the Arctic tundra. In recent years research has expanded to include a broad range of plant and animal communities.

"The original intent was to assess the impact of goose grazing on the Arctic tundra," said Cadieux. "But over the years the research program has broadened considerably and now includes other components of the terrestrial ecosystem. We also are interested in learning how climate change may impact the plant and animal communities of the tundra."

It is difficult to believe that the Arctic tundra—wildly remote and covered with ice for most of the year—could have anything in common with the Virginia coast. But it does, and this connection is evident in the life of the greater snow goose. A range map on the Laval University website (www.cen.ulaval.ca/gongsg/) shows summer breeding grounds in a fairly concentrated area on Bylot Island. Winter grounds center on the Virginia coast, extending northward along the Delmarva Peninsula into the Bombay Hook area of Delaware and southward to the sounds and shallow lakes of eastern North Carolina. The two are connected by a migratory route through central Quebec, with a staging area along the St. Lawrence estuary.

Snow geese travel to the Arctic to breed because in summer the tundra provides excellent habitat for nesting and raising goslings, with plenty of young grasses for forage. Timing is critical, however, because nesting can't occur until the snow melts, and the geese

must raise their young, molt, and be ready to head south before the fall snows arrive. Bylot averages only 101 days a year when the temperature climbs above freezing.

"The average laying date on Bylot Island is June 12," said Cadieux. "The eggs will hatch 23 to 24 days after the last egg is laid. The geese average about four eggs per nest, but nesting success depends largely upon weather and predators. The Arctic fox, parasitic jaeger, and raven are some of the principal predators of eggs and young birds. The adults also are vulnerable during the nesting season as they molt (shed and re-grow) all their flight feathers. So timing is everything. If snow-melt occurs later than usual, the birds might not nest at all."

At this time of year, a trip to the coast will provide a clue as to the success of the summer nesting season. Find a flock of snow geese in a wildlife refuge or farm field, scan them with your binoculars or scope, and see how many dusky gray birds are scattered in with the snowy white adults. The gray ones would be the juveniles, the birds that hatched last July, the ones that followed their parents on a flight through Quebec to the St. Lawrence wetlands, and finally to the coast of Virginia for the first time. And while you're scanning, keep an eye out for a bright yellow neck collar. If you happen to see number 44CC, tell her we say, "Welcome back." ❧

*Curtis Badger, whose most recent book is *A Natural History of Quiet Waters* (UVA Press), has written widely about natural history and wildlife art. He lives on Virginia's Eastern Shore.*

"These drier areas are a polar oasis supporting a great diversity of plant life. There are 360 plant species and 74 species of birds, including more than 100,000 greater snow geese in the summer. It's the largest breeding colony of snow geese in the world."

So when Bylot Island's blanket of snow disappears in the summer, the landscape becomes one of creeks, ponds, wetlands, and sloping uplands covered with grasses and sedges. Sound familiar? In July, Bylot might be a lot like Chincoteague in January.

The study of greater snow geese on Bylot began in 1988 through a partnership between Laval University in Quebec and the Canadian Wildlife Service. When the study began, snow goose numbers were growing tremendously, and biologists were worried about the negative effects a large breeding colony of



©Gregory J. Peis

Huntin



ng On The Wing

Falconry is Sport, Art, and a Way of Life



Page 16, Master Falconer Bill Barbour prepares his adult red-tailed hawk for hunting at the VFA Winchester Field Meet. Right, Barbour kneels by his hawk with its wings mantled over a just-captured rabbit. Above, Master Falconer Ray Miller proudly displays his American kestrel at a VFA hawk talk. Kestrels are awesome hunters.

story and photos
by Marie Majarov

I imagine walking along a hedgerow on a chilly winter morning. A red-tailed hawk “waiting on” (following overhead in falconry parlance) smoothly glides to a nearby branch with a glorious swooshing sound as its wings fold. “I never tire of that” says Master Falconer Bill Barbour. All the

while, the hawk’s keen eye is on the falconer flushing quarry below. A rabbit scurries from the underbrush; the hawk quickly takes off in aggressive pursuit. Strike! In an instant the rabbit is ensnared by powerful talons, the raptor’s wings “mantled (stretched) over” the prey. The bird is rewarded with a “tidbit” while the falconer smoothly stows the carcass and the bird returns afist, ready to hunt again. This is the art of falconry.

Our commonwealth is a wonderful place for falconry. It has numerous breeding hawks and falcons, a wide variety of game, and a passionate group of individuals who “share a common enterprise: falconry and a love for birds of prey and their environment” in the Virginia Falconers Association (VFA). A strong, mutually beneficial working relationship with the Department (DGIF) has been significant in VFA’s mission to keep falconry “relevant, legal, accessible, and ethical.”

Last January found falconers Dr. Eva King, president of the VFA, her husband Andrew King, and John Moore, dressed in their Sunday best with magnificent raptors on leather-gloved fists, together with DGIF Executive Director Bob Duncan addressing the General Assembly House Committee for Agriculture, Chesapeake, and Natural Resources. Their goal: approval of a critical bill that would help bring falconry in Virginia in line with federal standards, provide increased protections for retrieving falconers’ birds that previously applied only to hunting dogs, and





Dr. Eva King, president of VFA, holds gyr/saker Archimedes (Arc for short) who is quite the ambassador for falconry at public events.

impose penalties for anyone who intentionally removes a location-transmitting device from a bird.

Following a meet, greet, and picture snapping with the birds, Dr. King, holding "Kira" her red-tailed hawk, eloquently presented the bill, explaining its legal background, rationale, relevance, and practical implications. Director Duncan then spoke regarding the governor's support for the bill, emphasizing the negligible biological impact of falconers' activities and their positive contributions. The impressive delegation typifies the ethics, conservation values, regulations, and dedication that characterize this sport. With a magnificent gyr/saker hybrid falcon, red-tailed, and Harris hawk keeping their eyes on the delegates, the bill passed, unopposed. "It was beautiful!" states a grateful Dr. King.

Then and Now

Falconry is known to be well over 4,000 years old. Earliest records of hunting with raptors originate in ancient China, Arabia, and Persia. References by Aristotle place the sport of falconry in Europe as early as 300 BC, but not until Medieval times did it gain popularity, particularly in France and England. The sport of kings, theft of a trained raptor was punishable by death! Pageantry and spectacular falcon flights delighted the aristocracy, but for the common man, diminutive "sparrow hawks" helped to keep the larders stocked.

With the advent of effective sporting firearms, interest in falconry waned. Determined landowners, mainly in Britain, formed clubs to keep the art alive; in 1961 the North American Falconer's Association was founded (now approximately 2,000 members strong). Falconry is legal in 49 states today. Only Hawaii, in light of its specialized ecosystem, does not authorize falconry as a legitimate form of hunting.

Many of the ancient traditions still form the core of this sport, especially the acquiring of young falcons or hawks in the fall (see DGIF regulations link at end), hunting with them in the winter, and releasing them back into the wild come spring. The use of juvenile birds prevents disruptions to breeding adults and "helps the young raptors to survive the most vulnerable time of their life," says Dr. King, adding, "Only 25% survive their first year in the wild." Captive-bred and hybrid birds are also used, protected by transmitting



Master Falconer Brian Cullen and his Harris hawk display their skills at a VFA Field Meet. These medium-sized birds of prey are quite social and easy to train.



Master Falconer John Foley (R) passes on the art of hood making to Keiran Zwirner, a 1st Year Apprentice. You must be 14 years old to undertake a falconry apprenticeship.

devices to ensure their recovery and prevent escape into the wild. Falconers are serious conservationists.

The relationship between birds of prey and their falconer has always been and continues to be fundamental to the sport. Yes, there is "often an emotional connection for the human" to these splendid creatures in their care, explains Dr. King, but basically it is "a business relationship, a contract based on

trust and food." Raptors are "opportunists" that see the falconer as "useful, providing excellent hunting opportunities, safety, and regular quality food." Falconers know and respect that violations of this contract will end the relationship.

Way of Life

Being a falconer requires immense dedication, long-term demands of time, effort, knowledge, and resources. Dr. King describes it more as "a way of life." Being the only sport that utilizes a trained wild creature, it is also the most regulated sport with extremely stringent state and federal licensing requirements.

The first step in becoming a falconer is finding a sponsor, obtaining a packet of information from DGIF outlining federal and state permit and licensing processes, and understanding fully what an apprenticeship and caring for a bird will entail. Hawks have very specific requirements for food, housing, bathing, exercising, travel, and hunting opportunities.

The future apprentice must build a mews, study raptor identification, biology, natural history, maintenance of raptors in captivity, falconry practices, and regulations. After successfully passing a written exam and facilities inspection administered by a DGIF biologist, obtaining a written letter of commitment by his or her sponsor, and meeting appropriate seasonal hunting licenses and hunter education certification requirements, the apprenticeship may begin.

This leather hood, beautifully handcrafted by John Foley, will keep a raptor calm.



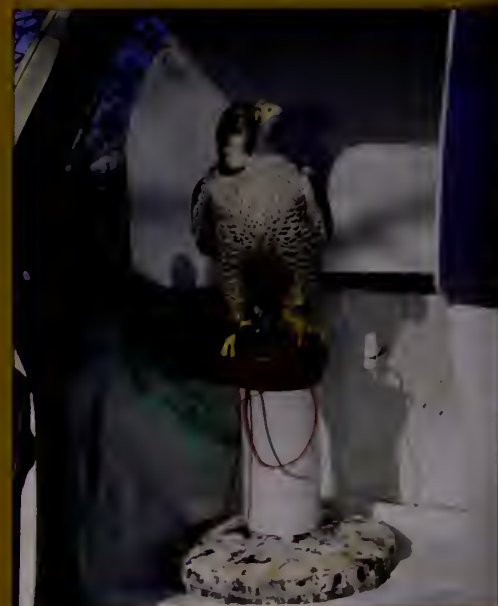


A falconry apprenticeship extends over two years, and when passed, the apprentice is eligible for a general falconry permit. After five years of practicing the sport at the general level, the falconer is then eligible to become a master permittee. DGIF inspections of raptors, mews, and equipment may be conducted at any time. Falconers know the importance of regulation and “ensuring that people are serious,” says Dr. King. “The standards we put on ourselves are usually more strict.” The responsible use of raptors is of utmost importance to protect the birds.

By 2014 all states will be required to meet newly updated federal standards (see link to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which oversees the protection of all species of birds). Regulation will then fall solely under each state. DGIF and the VFA have this upcoming deadline well in hand and will be operating under updated and approved regulations as of this writing.

Activities

Habitat conservation is a major focus for Virginia’s falconers: open spaces for falcons hunting from soars, zooming down head-first at stunning speeds (“a stoop”) to hit and then smoothly dispatch prey with their beaks; and hedgerows and forests for hawks, species that prefer to hunt from a perch. Virginia’s falconers along with DGIF have also contributed significantly to the restoration of raptor species devastated by the broad use of



Raptors require special care and equipment when traveling.

DDT following World War II; most especially, the peregrine falcon. Their kestrel nest-boxes and peregrine eyries dot the countryside.

Falconers also work closely with the Wildlife Center of Virginia and the Raptor Conservancy (RCV), aiding in the rehabilitation of injured and/or orphaned raptors. Who better to train a hawk in need of hunting skills to survive in the wild than an expert falconer? Creative raptor rescues must occasionally be engineered using falconers' specialized knowledge of raptor physiology and behavior. Dr. Eva and Andrew King were called by the RCV to help design such a rescue for a juvenile Cooper's hawk trapped in the main reading room of the Library of Congress. (Most likely, the Coop followed a pigeon through an open library window.) Patience and their knowledge that starlings are irresistible to hungry Coops led to success.

VFA provides open to the public events that are excellent opportunities to see these breathtaking raptors up close. "Hawk Talks," educational presentations highlighting falconry and conservation, are conducted in many locations around our commonwealth.

Two yearly field meets—January in Harrisonburg, and February in Winchester—allow guests to actually view falconers hunting with their birds as well as dutch-treat group dinners to hear hunting stories, ask questions, and for those considering becoming a falconer, talk to potential sponsors. An

annual late summer picnic provides time for falconers to catch up on news after the long summer "molt," show off new birds, meet new people, and link sponsors with those desiring apprenticeship. See the VFA website below for specific details of these events, which present a wonderful opportunity to learn more about falconry and VFA's deep commitment to their birds, conservation, education and advocacy for wild raptors.

Falconry is a very special sport, art, and

way of life. Gary Kershner, a second-year apprentice, expresses it beautifully: "All my life I have been in awe of nature, especially birds. Falconry allows me the opportunity to be part of nature first-hand, witnessing these spectacular birds and the balance of life and death. To me falconry is an ethical commitment." ❧

Marie and Milan Majarov (www.majarov.com) live in Winchester and are nature enthusiasts and active in the Virginia and Mason-Dixon outdoor writers associations. Marie is a Virginia Master Naturalist.



Every falconer must build a mews to house their raptor, with a weather-protected area and a screened-in open area for exercise.



Master Falconer Lee Chichester sees to her bird's water needs after a morning of traveling.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Virginia Falconers Association:

<http://vafalconryswva.net/WhoWeAre.html>

Virginia Falconry Regulations:

www.dgif.virginia.gov/forms/PERM/falconry.pdf

Raptors in Virginia:

www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/birds/raptors/

Falconry Education:

www.themodernapprentice.com/

North American Falconers Association:

www.n-a-f-a.com/

US Fish & Wildlife Migratory Bird Information:

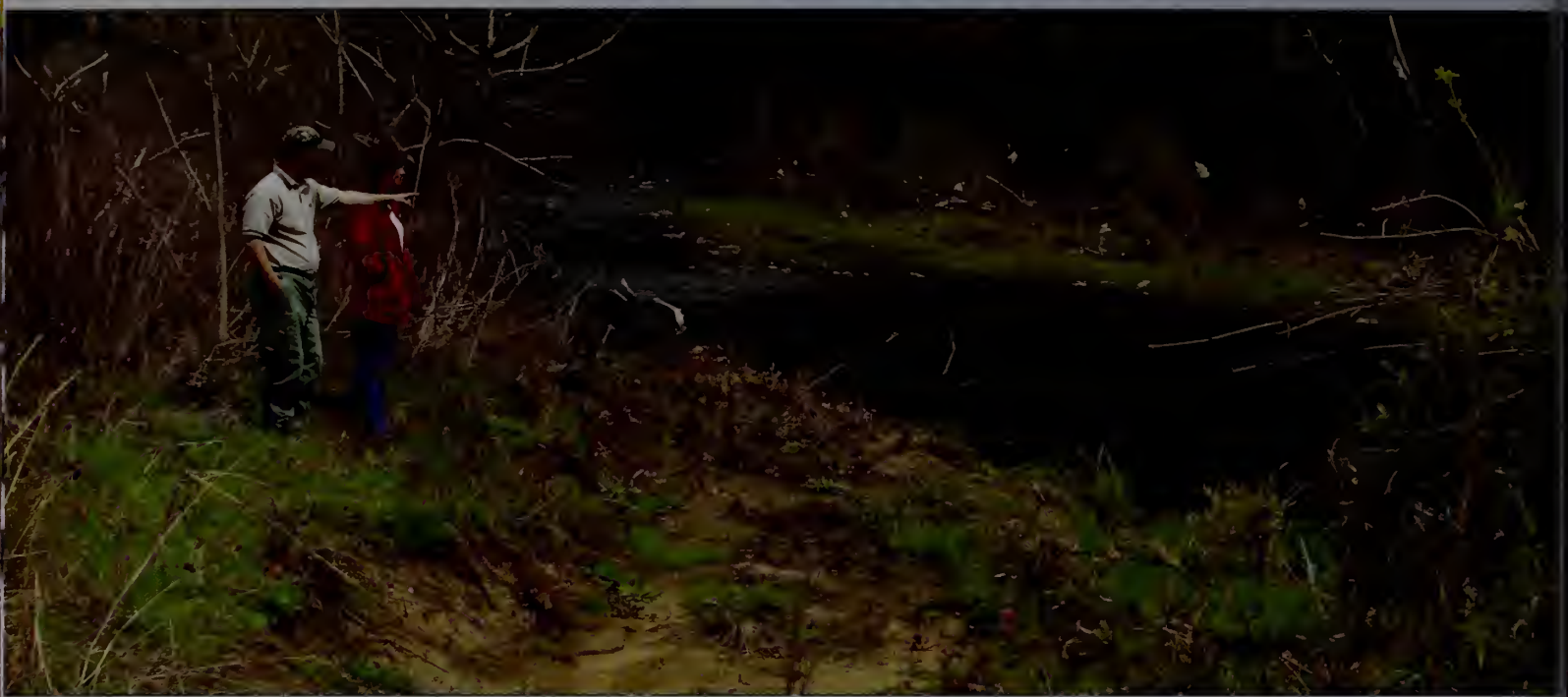
www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/

Wildlife Center of Virginia:

www.wildlifecenter.org/

The Raptor Conservancy of Virginia:

www.raptorsva.org/



BRINGING BACK A RIVER

Partners unite to restore the North Fork of the Powell.

by Bruce Ingram

On a cool, overcast day in early April, Justin Laughlin points to a badly eroded and quite steep, barren riverbank some 10 to 12 feet high and 200 feet long. At the downstream end of the bank, two trees, having lost their foundation because of erosion, have toppled.

We are at the Pennington Gap Project on the North Fork of the Powell as the river flows through Leeman Field Park in Lee County. The undertaking is part of a joint project among a full slate of public entities, among them the DGIF and the Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOT), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Upper Tennessee River Roundtable, the Daniel Boone Soil and Water Conservation District, and the town of Pennington Gap.

"It takes a culture to change a watershed, and one of the things the Pennington Gap partners want to show the public is how an Appalachian stream that has had diverse and



Top, stream restoration biologist Justin Laughlin points out an eroded shoreline. Deeply eroded banks characterized the North Fork of the Powell before restoration began.

©Bruce Ingram

extreme land use can be revitalized,” says Laughlin, a stream restoration biologist with the DGIF.

“Our ultimate goal is to improve wildlife habitat and water quality and reduce sedimentation over the course of approximately 1,000 linear feet of stream that flows through the park. As part of a parallel process, a greenway will be designed to follow along the waterway.”

During the spring, Laughlin and representatives from other agencies will plant hardwoods and shrubs favorable for wildlife, to reduce erosion and create shade along the denuded bank. Willows and shrubs such as silky dogwoods, elderberries, buttonbush, and indigo bushes will be planted closest to the water and 5 to 10 feet back will go red maples, Northern red, pin, and water oaks, sycamores, river birches, Eastern redbuds, yellow poplars, and black walnuts. Without this vegetation, the bank would continue to recede and the planned trail would be jeopardized as well.

At our next stop, Laughlin points to where a J-hook will be located. In engineering parlance, this is an upstream facing J-shaped structure made of rocks and wood

that diverts stream flow away from the bank and thus reduces erosion.

From there, we walk to where a bankfull bench will be created. The “bankfull” stage of flow is when water fills the shoreline and is about to overflow into the flood plain. To decrease the possibility of this happening, the upper bank is cut so that it angles backward, and the lower is filled in with a bottom layer of woody debris and soil. Soil mats are then positioned above and vegetation is planted. As a result, over time the streambed will deepen and the chance of flooding and further erosion will decrease.

From there, Laughlin takes me to the end of the project where a few feet above the river a sewer pipe spans the North Fork. Here, the plan is to construct a W-weir, which is a downstream facing backwards W-shaped structure typically made of rocks. The stream biologist explains that the W-weir will protect the pipe from washing out of its moorings. It will also dramatically reduce bank erosion and keep sediment from forcefully striking the pipe when water levels become high.

On our way back to the vehicle, Laughlin discusses other plans for the Pennington

Gap project. In one place, kudzu blankets the bank and participating partners will attempt to replace this invasive with native vegetation. At other stops, he speculates where kiosks could be located so that the public can learn about the benefits of these various stream restoration activities and why such things as buffer zones and native vegetation are important.

“The North Fork of the Powell has so much potential as a smallmouth bass stream,” says Laughlin. “But right now, there are places where we could step into the stream and sink up to our knees in silt, which makes it harder for smallmouths to find spawning areas. The Pennington Gap project will hopefully begin the process of improving streamside habitat for wildlife and in-stream habitat for fish and several species of threatened and endangered mussels.”

The Pennington Gap project will play itself out over the next several years, but one thing is clear: restoration of the North Fork has most certainly begun. *~*

Bruce Ingram has authored many guide books. For more information on Bruce Ingram's river fishing books: www.bruceingramoutdoors.com.



Justin Laughlin says the Pennington Gap project is a good example of how different partners can work together to improve a resource.



This sewer pipe marks the end of the project area. A W-weir will be constructed to reduce erosion.



A Bugle In The

Small deer are big game by the beach.

by Charlie Petrocci

As fall colors bleed into winter, the days become shorter and the nights become cooler. Along the Eastern Shore, the barrier islands begin to transform. The seasonal change in this challenging environment is often the trigger-pull for wildlife to either flee, flock, or mate. Out on Assateague Island late fall is also marked by fog-shrouded tidal marshes and half-naked hardwoods. Long gone are the summer crowds. The island is now owned by wads of shorebirds, passing peregrine falcons, and an

endless stream of fugitive waterfowl including the vanguard flocks of boisterous migrating snow geese. Consequently the cool air is filled with the sounds of wildlife. But as the sun sets each evening, the night vocalizations are owned by a mysterious, exotic animal from the far side of the world: one whose eerie cry beckons both bewilderment and curiosity.

The high-pitched call of this ungulate is like no other among Eastern Shore wildlife. And it almost always comes in a sequence of three. It is no Halloween prank, alien visitor, or woman being attacked in the woods. It is the call of a small Asian species of a diminutive elk known as the sika deer. The deep guttural

sound is the bugle of the male sika, claiming his piece of landscape on this barrier island and letting others know he is ready to do battle if need be.

And if you are fortunate this winter, you may see a bull sika emerge from the fog, cross a brackish pond and disappear like a ghost into a deep, almost impenetrable maritime forest mix of loblolly pines, thick myrtle bushes, and formidable greenbriers. He is a shadowy figure who sports a dark mane, chocolate coat, and swept-back antlers. Luckily, though, he is small in stature, since otherwise he would prove imposing to both island visitors and other wildlife alike.

Night

The Game Plan

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge has more than 14,000 acres of beautiful tidal marsh, freshwater marsh, and upland maritime forest. Each fall/winter season the refuge hosts an annual Big Game Bow and Firearms hunt program, targeting primarily sika deer. (There is a short whitetail season as well.) Over the decades, the sika hunt has been very popular.

"We get hunters from not only Virginia, but from across the mid-Atlantic region. Some of the hunters have been participating for years, with several generations now showing up. The hunt objective is to keep sika numbers in check and provide outdoor recreation," said Kim Halpin, deputy refuge manager. Sika are considered an exotic, nonnative species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

To participate in the refuge program, hunters can apply for a date and area through a contract management company called the Kinsail Corporation. Hunters selected must then attend a mandatory orientation at the refuge. "It lets hunters know the refuge regulations, safety issues, and the hunt area boundaries," added Halpin.

Public hunting areas for either sika or whitetail deer are broken into various Hunt Zones. There are approximately 18 hunt areas available, including one designated for wheelchair hunters. Sections 1 through 2a are open

©Lynda Richardson



©Lynda Richardson

Sika deer have been present in Virginia for 90 years and have adapted well to life in the coastal marshes and maritime forests of the Eastern Shore.

Foreign Invasion

Though sika deer are excellent swimmers, they certainly didn't paddle over here from Asia on their own. They don't have a shipwreck legend to claim either, like their fellow forest-dwelling friends—the wild ponies. No, they arrived on Assateague Island in a most unheralded way, as legend has it, by means of the Boy Scouts.

It all began when in 1916 a Maryland man by the name of Clement Henry acquired several exotic sika for his own, possibly as pets. Not long after, he released some of these animals on James Island, Maryland, and they soon spread to the mainland of Dorchester County. In 1920 another Maryland man purchased some sika, and the story goes that several male and female animals were then taken by the Boy Scouts and released on the Maryland side of Assateague Island. It didn't take long for the adaptable, mud-loving ungulates to colonize the whole island, including the Virginia portion. When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service created the Chincoteague National Wildlife refuge on Assateague Island (national refuges are traditionally named for where they get their mail; thus Chincoteague), in 1943, they, like the wild ponies, inherited by then a well established sika population. And it was growing. So much so that officials were afraid of overloading the carrying capacity of the island, including other forest and marsh dwellers such as whitetails and wild ponies. To help keep the soaring sika population in check they began a public hunt in 1965. Over the decades the hunt has proven not only very popular, but also very successful since sika numbers are currently at historic lows.

But sika have been extending their range on the Eastern Shore of both Maryland and Virginia for the last 20 years. Since they are good swimmers it was only a matter of time before they would break out of their Dorchester County, Maryland and Assateague Island historic bastions. Sika deer are now legal fair game in Wicomico, Somerset and Worcester counties of Maryland. And I know firsthand that they have been on Wallops Island and also at Saxis Wildlife Management Area in Accomack County. Evidently, the exotic elk have found an accommodating home on the Eastern Shore and they are here to stay.

A Little Sika Biology

Sika deer are actually sika elk. Yet they are a member of the genus and species *Cervus nippon*, which are true deer. As a matter of fact sika means “deer” in Japanese. Historically, sika inhabited China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Japan. In most parts of Asia sika have become endangered, except in Japan where they are considered abundant. (Preliminary genetic studies in Maryland suggest the Assateague sika originated from a small island in southern Japan.)

Sika are one of the few deer species that do not lose their spots into maturity. Fur color can change with the seasons with light brown prevalent in the warmer months and changing to a dark chocolate brown in winter. Bucks will sometimes become almost black during the rut. Males also have a short mane on their necks, and both the male and female will display a distinctive white rump when alarmed.

Sika are active throughout the day but will turn nocturnal if pressured by hunting. The rut occurs from September through early November, and the bucks are very territorial. The males will mark their territory with scrapes, or “wallows,” that they will urinate in, leaving a strong musky smell to warn other males. Both male and female sika emit numerous vocalizations, with the “chirp” or “bark” alarm being commonly heard and the guttural buck “bugle” the most distinctive and eerie call they make. Sika are small deer, averaging about 2 to 3 feet at the rump, with a 100-pound buck being very uncommon in the wild. Females will rarely exceed 75 pounds. Sika populations can now be found throughout the world. Here in the U.S., wild populations of sika are found in Texas, Maryland, and the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

For information on permits and lottery hunts on Chincoteague NWR:
www.fws.gov/northeast/chinco/hunting.html.



©Lynda Richardson

Sika bucks can be distinguished from a whitetail by their chocolate-colored coats and antlers that sweep back.

to shotgun, muzzleloader, or pistol hunting, while areas 3 through 11 are open for rifle as well. My favorite hunting area has always been area 8, known as Ragged Point. This area has diverse island habitat and also the slight remains of an 18th-century structure once called the Lonesome House. Pomegranate trees now mark the historic location.

Bag limits for sika are liberal at five animals per day, two of which may be antlered. Hunt seasons for the 2011 season were as follows: Bow season from October 17–26 and Firearms from December 5–16; and Firearms again from January 5–20, 2012. A total of 125 bow hunters were allowed to hunt the short 6-day season, which has been cut down from 5 weeks of bow hunting. This has upset some hunters.

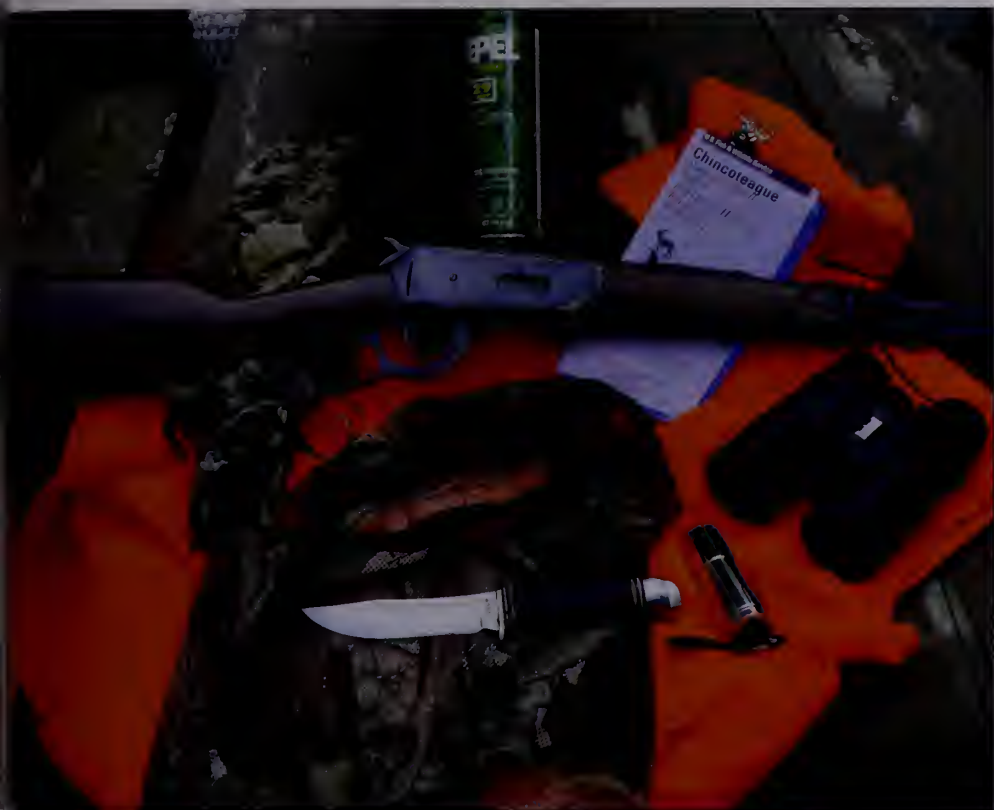
“It was a great bow hunt experience, but the refuge evidently believes that gun hunting is more effective in removing sika,” said one-time refuge bow hunter John Hollowell from Lancaster County. Overall, the sika hunt is aggressive by design, with more than 80 gun hunters allowed to harvest up to five deer each during any given two-day hunt. Multiply this times the amount of hunt days

and you have a potential harvest which far exceeds the animal load on the island. But the sika remain resilient.

Down and Dirty

Hunting for sika is not like hunting for white-tails. If you want to get a shot at an animal you need to get down and dirty, literally. Since they prefer hanging out in marshes, thick cover, and dense habitat, hunters will often find themselves crawling or wading into their domain. This type of hunting is not for the faint of heart. Sure, many sika are killed from portable tree stands in the upper maritime forest areas, but the big boys tend to hunker down in the thick stuff and to find them will take shedding some sweat and blood to briars, sharp salt grasses, and those ubiquitous marsh mosquitoes.

Sika will move through dense vegetation by using either existing pony trails or carving their own tunnels. Sika pathways are often small, tight, and low to the ground, where even a whitetail would have trouble navigating through. The best ambush points for hunters are where these trails intersect at a forest opening or funnel out to a marsh, either



To get down and dirty with sika in their island water world, you'll need comfortable rubber boots, bug spray, camo mask, and a close encounter brush gun like a 30-30 caliber rifle.

©Charlie Petrocci

Asian Elk Sear

Sika are very good eating and many hunters prefer the meat over whitetail. Below is a recipe for sika with an Asian twist.

2 pounds sika back-strap (tenderloin) cubed
 ¼ cup light soy sauce
 1 small ginger root, chopped
 ¼ cup Teriyaki
 Two squeezed lemons
 6 cloves garlic, chopped
 1½ cup Panko rice flakes
 (available in most stores)
 4 tablespoons canola oil

Marinate meat in soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, lemon juice and chopped garlic for 2 hours in a bowl. Remove meat chunks, drain, and then coat well in Panko flakes. Heat iron skillet with oil and cook meat on both sides for about 3 to 5 minutes total. Remove, garnish with scallions, drizzle with teriyaki sauce, and dabs of hot chili sauce. Serve with Basmati rice, steamed fresh broccoli, and snap beans.

tidal or fresh. Another good spot to hunt for sika is among the inside of secondary sand dunes behind the beach. There is nothing like hearing the haunting call of a bull sika coming from the dune area just as the sun is rising over the ocean. Experiences like this can't be bought.

For hunters, the most important piece of gear is perhaps a good pair of knee-high rubber boots. Inevitably if you are hunting sika the right way, you will encounter water and mud. So be prepared. Binoculars, a portable ladder or climbing stand, and insect repellent are also a plus in scoring an animal. As far as weapons, compound or crossbows will get you up close and personal for a great hunt experience. Guns need not be large caliber. A fast, flat shooting 270 or pump shotgun is all that is needed for harvesting these small animals in tight quarters. My personal favorite sika gun has always been a Winchester 30-30 caliber lever action rifle with open iron sights. It's an easy-to-handle, close encounter field and brush weapon that gets the job done.

A note of caution when shooting in low light conditions: The difference between a

whitetail and a sika can often be confusing. Sika deer have a low-to-the-ground profile, a large omnipresent white rump, faint white spots, and short ears. Male sika also have swept-back antlers, while a whitetail's antlers fold forward. And Eastern Shore sika bucks rarely sport more than six points total at any time in their life cycle.

So if you are fortunate enough to be drawn to hunt sika on Assateague Island, and you are sitting in a tree stand trying to squeeze the last of the daylight out of the hunt, search for those ghost-like shadows as they move through the maritime forest. Wait, what was that? Something splashing toward you through a shallow water pond. With your senses on high alert you hear three hair-raising bugles from the brush behind you. It's an ancient call from a diminutive elk from the Far East, the opposite side of the world. Count yourself fortunate to be able to hunt and experience them right here on Virginia's Eastern Shore. 🦌

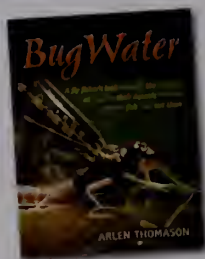
Charlie Petrocci is a maritime heritage researcher, lecturer, and consultant who specializes in coastal traditions such as fisheries, seafood, and community folklife. He has lived on the shore for 25 years.



©Charlie Petrocci

By setting up near open marshes, hidden "wallows," and crossing trails, a hunter can sometimes get a shot at eye level. Tree stands will occasionally offer an advantage.

AFIELD AND AFLOAT



Outdoor Classics

by
Beth Herter

Bugwater: A Fly Fisher's Look Through The Seasons at Bugs in Their Aquatic Habitat and the Fish That Eat Them

by Arlen Thomason

2010 Stackpole Books
Hardcover with color photographs
www.stackpolebooks.com

"Water with many different types of bugs living in it is healthy water. And because the healthiest waters are usually those least disturbed by the activities of man, they generally rate high on the aesthetics scale too. I can think of few places I would rather be than on good bugwater."

—Arlen Thomason

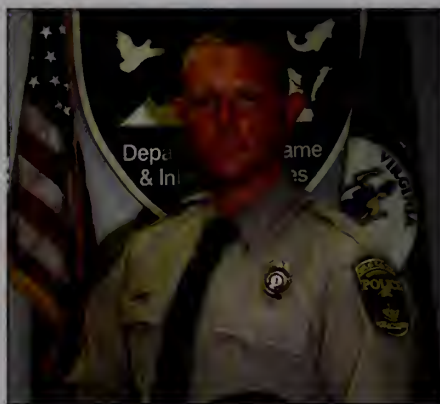
Several years ago, while browsing through the magazine rack of a local outdoor supply store, the cover of a well-known fly tying magazine captured my attention. It was a picture of a stonefly nymph, a fly tying tour de force so incredibly realistic, it looked as if it had been freshly plucked from some pristine trout water. The close-up photo showcased every detail of the insect's exoskeleton. As a novice fly angler tying up my first serviceable batches of Clouser minnows, terrestrials, and wooly buggers, that photo inspired me to take a closer look at the insects that trout were likely to slurp up. I hunted for books that would provide me with large, color photos of these fish canapés, but I found existing volumes inadequate for my needs.

Now, a recent Stackpole publication, *Bugwater*, fits the bill in every way. Written by a fly angler who happens to be a retired molecular biologist, the book follows both bugs and trout through their seasonal life cycles. Large, highly detailed, glossy photos that show the bugs in their native habitats are complemented by staged photos taken in specially constructed 'slant-tanks'. Particularly helpful are those shots that show how insects and their fly imitation look as they're

buoyed by surface tension, or as they appear below the water. There is plenty of hard science in this book, especially in those sections describing fish optics, but the science is integrated into the text with a light hand, and descriptions of 'what fish see, and how they see it' are interesting in the extreme. Though much of the author's perspective comes primarily from his western home waters, the information translates easily wherever trout waters flow.

Amazing descriptions of how these trout-attracting bugs live out their lives greatly expand our perceptions of them, whether we experience them as anglers, outdoor photographers, naturalists, or fly tiers. As case-makers, caddisfly display an exacting craftsmanship; some nymphs look like miniature lobsters whose specialized body parts help them burrow into sediment; predaceous, aquatic-diving beetles extract oxygen from the air, and as adults, carry their air supply with them as they go under water; March brown nymphs have flattened, frog-like faces that help reduce water resistance in swift currents; and some aquatic worms get their red color from the oxygen-carrying hemoglobin within their tissues.

This month, make a New Years' resolution you can keep: Pledge to learn something new about trout and the buggy waters in which they thrive.



Congratulations to CPO Richard Howald, a member of the DGIF K9 Team, who was selected as the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Law Enforcement Officer of the Year during the recently completed conference in Nashville, TN. Richard is the first officer from Virginia to be selected for this prestigious honor.

Access to DGIF WMAs and Lakes May Require a Permit

Effective January 1, 2012, an Access Permit will be required when using any Department-owned wildlife management area or fishing lake. The Access Permit is not required for any person holding a valid Virginia hunting, fishing, or trapping license or a current Virginia boat registration, or persons 16 years of age or younger. The Access Permit requirement does not apply to Department-owned boat ramps or to hikers on the Appalachian Trail passing through Department-owned lands. The permit fee is \$4 for a daily permit or \$23 for an annual permit and may be purchased online or at any license agent. For more information go to the Department's website at www.dgif.virginia.gov.



Buy Your Lifetime License
1-866-721-6911

Report Wildlife Violations
1-800-237-5712

ATTENTION YOUNG WRITERS

Wondering what to do over the holidays?

The Virginia Outdoor Writers Association annually sponsors two writing competitions for Virginia high school students (grades 9-12) and undergraduate students attending a Virginia college or university. Awards of gift certificates, outdoors gear, and cash are offered for winning entries.

Go to www.vowa.org for contest guidelines, the submission deadline, and other details. Then grab some paper or a laptop and get to work! **Deadline is February 13, 2012.**



Three CPOs visited the newly formed Nature Club, of the Boys and Girls Club in Kilmarnock. They gave a presentation, and Jake (of the DGIF K9 team) showed participants how he could find a turkey feather hidden in an outside compartment of the activity bus. Pictured here are CPO Megan Vick, with Jake, and board member Mary Louisa Pollard.

12th Annual Virginia Fly Fishing Festival

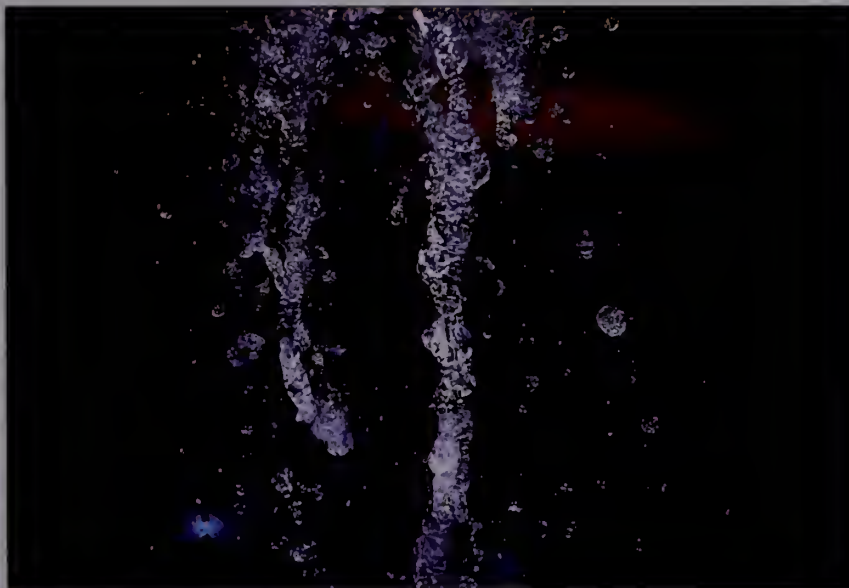
Waynesboro
April 21–22, 2012

www.vaflyfishingfestival.org

Answers to the December 2011 "Byrd Nest" Crossword Puzzle

B	B	E	R	G	A	M	O	T		B	B	
U	R	E	I		A		L	A	G	O	O	N
E	E	E	S	U	M	M	O	N	S	I	A	O
E	A	E			R		L					C
A	D	M	I	R	A	L	B	E	A	K		R
L			V		C		E	S		U		U
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IMAGE OF THE MONTH



Congratulations go to Silvanita Alvarado, a commercial photography student at the Chesterfield Technical Center, for her awesome stop action photograph of water flowing from a fountain taken at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden during *A Day of Photography in the Garden* this past October 22. Way to go Silvanita! Nikon D40X digital SLR camera, ISO 400, 1/3200th, f/5.6.

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

White

Winter = Th

essay by Matt Knox

After the chaos of the fall breeding season, one might think that winter in the whitetail's world would offer a welcome respite. It does not. It will be the deer's most trying season; a season of survival. For most of the year, nature typically provides a bountiful plenty for deer, but in winter her cupboard can be pretty bare. It is cold and it snows.

One of the whitetail's most amazing winter adaptations is its winter coat. The gray brown coat, which it acquired at the start of the fall rut, has tremendous insulative capabilities. Anywhere from one-quarter to one inch thick, it is composed of long, hollow, protective guard hairs with a very thick and dense under fur. The guard hairs provide protection, and the under fur traps air and insulates the deer. One of the best examples of this insulating ability is deer bedded down during a snowstorm. In spite of a normal body temperature exceeding 100°, the falling snow just piles up on them and does not melt. That's a good coat!

To conserve energy during bitterly cold days, deer drastically restrict their movements and activity. In northern states, deer migrate long distances to traditional winter yarding areas. Deer in Virginia do not migrate or yard, but they make use of thermal cover during cold spells. Thermal cover in Virginia is typically characterized by fairly dense stands of evergreens like pines or cedars. The ambient temperature in these habitats is not significantly different, but because these habitats almost completely block the wind, the energy savings related to convective heat loss (think wind chill) to a deer are very significant. Also, snow depths in these dense evergreen stands are commonly much less than in open woods and fields. To conserve energy, deer travel more during the day and sunny periods. They will often bed on open, east-southeast slopes to lie in the sun.

Deer Biology

The Season of Survival



©Bill Lea

If a good mast crop was available back in the fall, deer will come into winter in good to very good condition with globs of waxy white fat. If acorns are still available, they will continue to be used heavily during winter and deer can continue to lay down fat. Deer with adequate body fat will survive normal winters here. Grasses and evergreen browse like greenbrier, honeysuckle, and privet are also important winter foods. If available, deer will make significant use of high-quality crops like wheat, oats, rye, alfalfa, clovers, or standing corn. If such foods are not available, deer will eat almost anything. In some cases it costs the deer more in energy to find, eat, and digest low-quality food than they gain from doing so. Often in high-density herds, heavy browsing pressure during winter will cause a clear browse line to become apparent where deer have eaten all the vegetation below about five feet or more. One of the best examples of a browse line in Virginia can be seen in the Big

Meadows area of Shenandoah National Park. At some point during winter, because of the cold weather and snow, most deer will begin to burn more calories than they are taking in and start to operate at an energy deficit. They will begin burning their fat reserves. It is not unusual now for deer to lose a significant amount of their body weight; to minimize weight loss and save energy, a deer's metabolism actually slows down. However, if they come into winter in poor condition and the season is long and hard with deep snow, starvation from malnutrition is a very real possibility.

In this winter race for survival, fawns are at a distinct disadvantage. In the fall, when adults are building up their fat reserves, fawns are storing fat but are also still growing. First-year biology and Bergmann's rule may be their undoing. This rule says that since they are small, fawns have a higher surface to volume ratio and therefore have to spend more

energy staying warm than large-bodied adults. Because they have less fat to fall back upon and a higher winter energy bill, fawns will be the most likely to die first.

Winter starvation of deer in Virginia is fairly uncommon, but in 1993, following a near-total mast failure in fall 1992 and a very big winter storm in mid-March, it occurred in the Alleghany Highlands. During this starvation event, deer were literally eating the bark off trees. These very late winter storms are often hard on the animal because, as spring approaches, a deer's metabolism naturally begins to increase and fat reserves are depleted.

The winter of 2010 may also have resulted in some mortality. After a poor mast crop in fall 2009 and more than a decade of very little snowfall, early 2010 saw much of the state's western reaches covered in snow for up to two months—very unusual in Virginia. While snowfalls of just a couple of inches reduce deer movements, depths of a foot or more severely restrict movements. Traveling in such conditions is very expensive from a deer's energy conservation perspective, and during strong snowstorms deer have been reported to remain bedded for one to two days at a time. Also, snow makes deer more vulnerable to predation. Crusted snow allows small, light, soft-footed predators like coyotes to run across the top of the surface, while the heavier-bounding deer breaks through. This crusted snow condition that favors predators was fairly common in western Virginia during winter 2010.

Other changes brought by winter: Doe family groups that were temporarily broken up by the breeding season have regrouped and settled down to a routine of feeding, resting, and conserving energy. Even adult bucks become social again and readily accept the company of other males. They will typically begin dropping their antlers in late December, and antler casting will continue through February. By March, nearly all bucks will have lost their antlers (occasionally, into late March or April). As a general rule, older, more dominant bucks tend to cast their antlers first, probably due to the stress of the rut. Healthy deer typically hold their antlers longer.

As the days begin to warm, deer anticipate spring's awakening—a season of plenty.

Matt Knox is a deer project coordinator for the Department, serving south-central Virginia.



Most of this week was spent getting the house spic and span for my annual "After the Hunt Season Party." The oriental carpets have been cleaned; everyone's favorite dog bed has been laid out; and ice is in the porcelain water bowls with the flushing quail motif. I have just put out the hors d'oeuvres of raw carrots and buffalo beef jerky and thrown a couple of hickory logs on the fire burning in the library.

All of this because tonight is *"the"* soiree, when all my hunting buddies get together for some good food and refreshments and critique the just-finished hunting season (and our human hunting partners!). We used to meet at the *beginning* of each hunting season to plan how we would help our humans improve on their hunting performance, but we soon learned that good intentions don't always produce good results. Most of us dogs agreed that after a great deal of effort on *our* part, followed by either hard-headedness or just plain ineptitude on *their* part, we dogs were just not hunting under champion humans! All of us hunting canines had to resign ourselves to the reality that sometimes—no matter how much training you give a human—they are not going to be a champion in the field and so you just have to live and love what you have, no matter how poor or inconsistent they may be.

Most of my guests are Labradors, which makes for a laid-back, relaxing affair—except for the year when one of the late-comers had obviously been into some catnip before showing up at the party and tossed out a couple of tennis balls. Everyone went berserk! I do have a few pointers, setters, and continental breeds over, just to get a general idea about how the quail population is doing.

Gunner and Gauge, two yellow Labs, are the first to arrive and when I opened the door, I noticed a distinct odor. "What have you two boys been rolling in?" I inquired.

"You like it?" they remarked, in unison. "It's a new scent we uncovered called 'Wet Dog and Pond Scum!' We are trying to get an edge on the competition, knowing that Mr. Alec Woolfolk's two chocolate females are coming tonight."

"I hate to be the one to tip over your dog dishes, boys," I replied, "but you are forgetting that those three sharp guys—Prize, Logan, and Shadow from Stuarts Draft—are coming tonight, and if looks aren't enough, you have got to contend with a couple of dapper British Labs from Sperryville. And y'all know how the ladies love an English accent!" I don't like taking the wag out of some dog's tail, but I wanted everyone focused on why we meet each year.

My chef, who prepares my meals twice a day, is not the most creative cook in the kitchen. Anything beyond opening a bag and pouring the contents into a bowl is pretty much beyond him. However, he did come up with the idea of adding some bits of cheese, a few sardines, and some leftover baked potato to our chicken and rice dish, which I figured would please everyone.

After dinner we normally watch a video of some of our hunting trips, which are always interesting—especially if one of us has gotten to do a little traveling and flush or point a different type of game bird. Invariably, there is some Chesapeake showing slides of himself swimming a mile or so in heavy seas, in a blizzard, in failing light, retrieving a wing-tipped goose. The only thing we Labs draw from these annual PowerPoints is that a Chesapeake is just plain crazy! Or goose hunters are just lousy shots. The pointing

breeds moan about how hard quail are to find these days and how their human partners are getting older and slower.

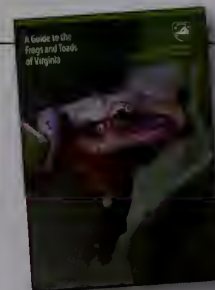
"That old preacher I hunt with," one English setter related last year, "is so slow getting to me that after I was on one point I had become really good friends with the quail I was pointing. So, I moved off point just when my companion was getting ready to shoot and headed somewhere else. It didn't make my hunting partner happy, but he seemed to move a little faster on the next point!"

The highlight of the evening will be our guest speaker, Marc Puckett, a small game biologist from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, making a presentation on how the new quail revitalization plan is going. This program assists property owners in managing a portion of their property they've set aside for quail habitat. Those in the program who have spoken with Ol' Jones are very pleased with the early results. If you, or your group, want to learn more about this important habitat program and how to bring back quail, you can contact Marc at Marc.Puckett@dgif.virginia.gov.

It would certainly go a long way toward giving those pointing dogs less to whine about!

Keep a leg up,
Luke

You can contact Luke and hunting partner Clarke C. Jones at www.clarkecjones.com.



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PHOTO TIPS

by Lynda Richardson

Another Year of Possibilities!

As another year begins, I look forward to watching and photographing the seasons as they change throughout the commonwealth. At this point in my life, I know what natural cycles and events are happening around here, and it's this knowledge that can guide me to the best photographic opportunities for the year.

In January, I know that the bald eagles are preparing their nests for another season of raising chicks. Some of them are already sitting on eggs. I know that on an unseasonably warm day in February, I might hear a spring peeper clearing his throat in anticipation of warmer days ahead. March brings osprey back to the bay and its tributaries in preparation for the annual nesting season and the spring runs of shad, striper, and herring. Native wildflowers begin to peek through the soil and salamanders tumble in courtship around various sinkholes, ponds, and wet areas throughout the state. In March, April, and May, migratory songbirds begin to arrive to set up shop in our forests, fields, and wetlands. I could go on and on.

But you see my point. By understanding the natural cycles of the plants and animals that call Virginia their home, you can take advantage of this knowledge for planning your photographic activities. A great place to look to begin the process is the Department's website. This site offers an enormous amount of information that includes specific species write-ups, locations for wildlife management areas, the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trails, wildlife-related festivals, and even information on the Virginia Master Naturalist Program, to name a few. This information will lead you to locations and even introduce you to experts in the field with whom you can talk further. What a great resource! Check it out at: www.dgif.virginia.gov.

And don't forget our favorite, *Virginia Wildlife*. This magazine is an extremely valu-



Each year, around mid-November, I try to make a trip to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge to photograph migrating waterfowl and resident wildlife. Learning the natural cycles of nature can up the ante of your photography successes. ©Lynda Richardson.

able resource on what is going on across the state. Whether you are interested in photographing the breeding antics of spotted salamanders, hunting dogs on point, fly fishing for trout, bald eagles along the James, or when and where to find bluebells or trillium blooming, *Virginia Wildlife* covers it! You do have your subscription up-to-date, right?

This January, pause to think about and learn the natural cycles occurring throughout the year and begin to plan your photography adventures accordingly. Use the best resources you can find and be ready to capture those photographs of a lifetime!

Welcome to 2012 and Happy Shooting!

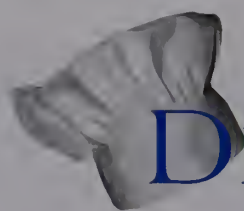
Lynda Richardson's Photography Workshops

All classes are held at Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. Go to www.lewisginter.org to register and look under Adult & Family Education or call (804) 262-9887 x322 (M-F, 9AM – 5PM).

Photographing Winter Wonders on February 9, 11, 16. Learn how to find exciting photographic opportunities in the winter landscape!

Advanced Flash Clinic on March 15, 17, 22, 24, 29. Know how to use your hot shoe flash? Learn to use more than one flash, and more!

Making the Most of Your Digital Camera on April 18, 21, 25, 28, & May 2. Learn the various settings on your camera and how to make them work for you!



Dining In

by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Sugar on Snows: Snow Goose Skillet



Snow geese are regular visitors to the Delmarva area, arriving in flocks numbering in the many thousands (see page 10). Hunting them can be a challenge, not to mention a lot of work, given that it takes hundreds of decoys just to begin to get their attention. Compared to cousins such as Canada geese and white-fronted (specklebelly) geese, snow geese often get a bad rap in the culinary world. One common, disrespectful nickname is “sky carp.”

Waterfowl diet is the critical driver in how those birds will taste. A fish-eating diving duck just doesn't taste as good as a mallard that has been dining in flooded cropland. Before snow geese arrive in our area, they typically eat a more eclectic diet and their taste reflects it. Once they nosh for a few weeks in corn stubble fields and other leftover croplands, though, they can be made plenty palate pleasing.

We collected a few mid-February snow geese last year and pulled together this sweet and simple skillet dish.

Ingredients

Brine (salt/water mixture)
2 snow goose breasts, skinned
¼ stick unsalted butter, divided
2 small apples, peeled, cored and cut into ¼-inch slices (we like Granny Smith)
⅓ cup dried fruits (we used a mixture of prunes, raisins, and cherries)
¼ cup dark brown sugar
Fresh ground pepper, to taste
¼ teaspoon cinnamon
⅓ cup dry white wine

Trim all visible silver skin from breasts and place in a glass or plastic bowl. Cover with water and stir in tablespoon of salt. Brine in refrigerator for 8 hours. Drain well and pat dry.

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. It is hard to beat a seasoned cast iron skillet for this type of dish. Add goose and a dash of fresh ground black pepper and brown on both sides, reducing heat if necessary to keep butter from burning. Remove goose breasts while rare and slice ¼ inch thick across the grain of the meat.

Add remaining butter and apples to the pan and cook for 2 minutes. Add other dried fruits and cook another minute. The apples should be soft, but not mushy. Add brown sugar and wine, stirring to ensure the sugar completely dissolves.

Put the meat back into pan and cook until it is heated through. Medium-rare is best in terms of preserving flavor and tenderness. Definitely do not cook the breast meat past medium. The sauce should be slightly reduced at this point.

Serve immediately over rice. Serves 2 or 3.

Canada goose or duck breasts could be used in place of snow goose.

The dish is sweet. To help balance it, serve a side dish such as green beans sautéed with tomatoes and garlic, or pecans and almonds. A French onion soup makes a good starter course. Celebrate the end of the waterfowl seasons by pairing this dish with a Riesling or Sauterne wine.



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